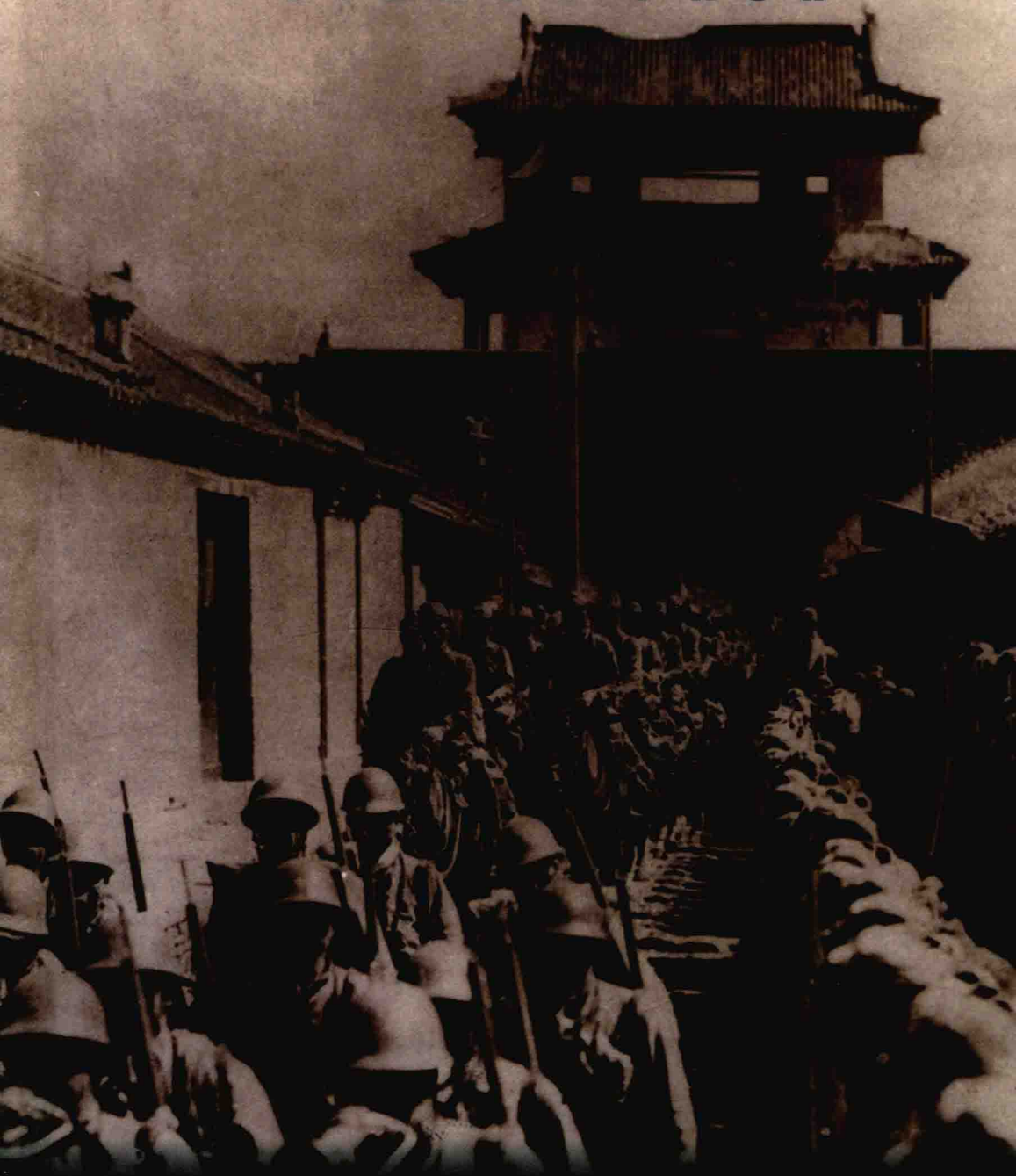


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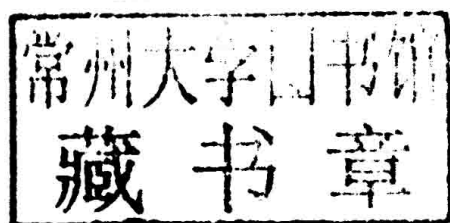
The Currents of War

A New History of American-Japanese Relations, 1899–1941

THE CURRENTS OF WAR

*A New History of
American-Japanese Relations,
1899-1941*

SIDNEY PASH



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Preface

Admiral Yamamoto knew that the Japanese Empire's future rested on the opening battle of the war. His task force had to sail undetected over a vast sea and destroy the enemy fleet in port. If Japan's opponent detected his ships or set a trap, all would be lost. A smashing victory in the war's early hours could lead to a negotiated settlement but not victory, for the enemy possessed a true two-ocean navy, and Japan's European ally had not proved that it could prevent the redeployment of this second, more powerful armada. Compared to its opponent, whose people numbered over 100 million and whose territory spanned a continent, Japan was a second-rate power.

The roots of the fast-approaching war stretched back to the last century and centered on competition over China. Japan's rival across the sea, driven by economic and security concerns, supported Chinese resistance to Japanese territorial and commercial expansion and in doing so made a fundamental solution to Sino-Japanese difficulties all but impossible. Successive cabinets attempted to reconcile competition over China and stabilize Japan's position on the Asian mainland, and, when these attempts failed, Tokyo sought a great-power alliance. While the prime minister, Taro Katsura, believed that an alliance would ease Japanese security concerns, make the empire's rivals more tractable, and pave the way for the fulfillment of Japanese ambitions in Asia, events soon proved him wrong.¹

Japan's alliance with Europe's strongest power did nothing to deter its rival. Thousands of miles from Tokyo, at the edge of a great continent, in the capital named for its legendary leader, the empire's adversary pursued a complicated strategy designed to contain Japanese expansion. This policy was predicated in part on the belief that Japan would never wage a war it could not hope to win, and, while race no doubt played a part in this calculation, so too did numbers. Population, industry, wealth, and military power all weighed heavily against Japan. The empire did have a small advantage in that any conflict would take place near the home islands, but the enemy could easily offset this limited tactical edge with a redeployment of men and matériel to the Far East. Tokyo's rival was a continental power, yet with its great naval base standing astride Japan it projected military might to the very heart of the empire.

In the months leading up to war, Japan's rival celebrated the success of its strategy as desultory negotiations bought time for the deployment of tens of thousands of soldiers and scores of warships to Asia. Yet this policy may

have been too successful, for in the final autumn of peace the conviction that Japan would never fight had spread to friend and foe alike, thus undercutting any impetus to reach a successful agreement. On the eve of war, both the British and the Russian ambassadors doubted that Japan would fight, and, given this conviction, how could a great power make concessions to a second-tier nation? Moreover, might Japan interpret an eleventh-hour compromise as a sign of weakness? The commander of the Pacific Fleet thought so and warned: "Concession to Japan will lead us to a more certain break."²

In Japan, meanwhile, the government at last cast the dice for war. Japan's last prewar prime minister, Katsura, a stubborn opponent of the coming conflict, maintained that the enemy gave the empire little choice. "There is no question," he argued, "but that . . . [our opponent's] aim was from the start to increase her military and naval forces and then reject Japan's demands." Given this policy, he noted, "if Japan does not now go to war and defend her threatened interests, she will eventually have to kowtow." The decision to wage war, however, could not mask fatalism akin to desperation. Another former prime minister and onetime general, Aritomo Yamagata—hardly a rarity for inter-war Japan—neatly summarized his nation's position: "Although we cannot foretell victory or defeat, we must enter the battle confident of victory. If we should by any chance fail, it would be an immeasurable catastrophe." With no better option available, Japan's senior leaders opted to gamble all on a war that the country would not likely survive. One day after the imperial conference endorsed the cabinet's decision for war, Admiral Gonnohyoe Yamamoto, the navy minister, ordered Admiral Heihachiro Togo to attack the Pacific Fleet at Port Arthur.³

Russian containment had failed.

Japan's victory over Russia in the ensuing Russo-Japanese War fundamentally reshaped the Far Eastern strategic landscape as well as Japanese-American relations. Before 1904, Americans saw Japan as the Open Door's champion. By the end of 1905, Tokyo replaced St. Petersburg as the greatest threat to China, and for the next thirty-six years successive American administrations worked to safeguard the Open Door and contain Japanese expansion on the Asian mainland.

The Open Door, which supported commercial equality in China as well as China's territorial and administrative integrity, defined American foreign policy in the Far East for nearly half a century. Every president sought to guarantee equal access to the China market for American business, and, while military strategists differed as to the importance of the Open Door, preserving that country's territorial integrity remained a critical objective of US foreign policy.⁴

The architects of the American containment of Japan did not use the term *containment* to describe their policy of combating Japanese continental expansion. Nonetheless, beginning with one Roosevelt and ending with another, Washington protected the Open Door, though not always perfectly, by limiting the extension of Japanese control over China.⁵

Successive administrations built containment on four firm pillars, the first three of which President Theodore Roosevelt constructed between 1905 and 1908. Roosevelt broke ground on containment's first pillar, maintenance of the balance of power, in 1905 when he helped broker the Portsmouth Treaty, which ended the Russo-Japanese War. He recognized that a balance among the competing powers could exercise a restraining hand on further Japanese expansion, and, while Japanese power in Asia only increased over time in relation to that of Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States, preventing Japan from gaining hegemony in Asia remained a consistent American goal. He erected a second pillar, military deterrence, when he sent the Great White Fleet to Japan on its 1907 world cruise. Coming at a time when a US-Japanese war seemed so likely that the president also ordered commanders in the Philippines to prepare for a Japanese attack, the fleet appeared to deter Japan and convinced Roosevelt that his decision produced "the most important service [he] rendered to peace." While this was not the last time that Washington used military deterrence, thereafter policymakers preferred to use a third pillar, diplomatic engagement. In May 1908, before the fleet had even returned home, Japan and America agreed to a five-year arbitration treaty. In November of that year, Secretary of State Elihu Root and Ambassador Kogoro Takahira forged a pivotal agreement that provided for American recognition of Japan's sphere in Manchuria in return for Tokyo's recognition of US control in the Philippines. The agreement also pledged both governments to respect the status quo in the Far East and work to support Chinese independence. Successive administrations used diplomacy to gain even more explicit Japanese support for the Open Door as well as for the League of Nations, naval disarmament, and the renunciation of war.⁶

President Woodrow Wilson built containment's last pillar, economic warfare, following America's entrance into the First World War. On August 2, 1917, the White House announced that the United States would export steel only under export license. This, coupled with Washington's earlier decision to rejoin the multinational banking consortium and challenge Japan's growing financial hold on China, led Tokyo to dispatch the Viscount Kikujiro Ishii to America to reiterate Japan's fidelity to the Open Door. Overall, these four pillars supported a remarkably successful policy that helped main-

tain American commercial, missionary, and political activity in China and prevented, especially after 1918, the strongest nation in Asia from imposing its will on China.⁷

Following the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931–1933, in which Japan seized Manchuria and created the puppet state of Manchukuo, policymakers modified the means and methods for containing Japan, yet the overall goal remained essentially unchanged. After 1933, containment sought to prevent Japan from expanding beyond Manchuria, and, following the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration sought to limit Japanese gains in China proper. If American goals remained unchanged, Washington's methods for halting Japan changed considerably. First, while successive administrations had employed diplomatic engagement, the architects of containment now sought to restrain Japan by a deliberate policy of disengagement in which Washington refused to conclude any diplomatic agreements that might in some measure strengthen Japan or weaken China. Second, with China now united under Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party, senior officials worked to increase American economic and military aid in order to even the odds on the battlefield and bolster Chinese morale. Along with these new measures, the architects of American containment employed, on a scale previously unknown, traditional methods, including military deterrence and economic coercion.

While often unpopular among supporters of China as well as among interventionists who felt it did too little, isolationists who felt it did too much, and competing government agencies and turf-conscious officials, American containment succeeded beyond all expectations. By July 1940, Chinese armies had tied down the vast Japanese war machine for three years, which was no small feat given that as recently as 1931 Japan had driven China from Manchuria in a matter of months and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo the following year.

Even as America thwarted the Japanese war effort in China between 1937 and 1940, the prime objective of American containment had begun to undergo significant changes. For decades, American strategists worked to check Japanese expansion in China in order to support a long-range American foreign policy goal, the Open Door. After September 1940, however, *policymakers sought to contain Japan within China in order to secure a more important, more immediate, short-term goal, the weakening of the Axis Alliance.* If Japan remained mired in China, policymakers reasoned, it could threaten neither the Western democracies nor the Soviet Union. This change paralleled Hitler's threat to Europe and the growing German-Japanese rapprochement that culminated in Tokyo's decision to join the Axis Alliance in September 1940.

The following year, policymakers rightly celebrated the success of the new American containment policy. Tokyo did not follow up on its occupation of northern French Indochina and also refrained from violating Thai sovereignty. Nor, despite German triumphs in Europe, did Japan move against the East Indies, Malaya, or Singapore. Most importantly, Japan did not join its Axis partner's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. By confining the Japanese military within China, Washington had apparently secured its more important short-term objective, the weakening of the Axis Alliance.

Despite their continued success, American officials began to abandon their heretofore cautious and successful containment policy during the summer of 1941 in favor of a strategy that sought to secure *both an immediate imperative, the weakening of the Axis Alliance, and a fundamental long-term objective, the maintenance of the Open Door*. This shift in policy was not always clear, nor was it universally popular, especially among naval leaders and some State Department and Treasury officials. Unfortunately, their cautious voices increasingly were in the minority, especially after the German invasion of the Soviet Union convinced a growing number of policymakers that, as long as the Nazi-Soviet War continued, the United States could drastically increase economic sanctions against Japan with little risk of war. As the fighting in Russia dragged on into autumn without a decision and the Anglo-American strategic position improved worldwide, senior officials discarded containment and, in an effort to secure at once both short-term objectives and a long-term goal, worked to roll back Japanese gains in China and break the Axis Alliance. Tragically, this decision coincided with the final success of American containment. After a generation of effort, this patient American policy had brought about during the last half of 1941 a Japanese decision to reorient the empire's foreign policy in such a way that the attainment of both short-term goals and a long-term objective were within Washington's grasp.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, American officials, like their Russian counterparts some forty years earlier, conducted elaborate negotiations designed to buy time but never bear fruit. In Japan, meanwhile, the government of Hideki Tojo grew convinced that additional negotiations were useless and would only further play into American hands. Mirroring the fatalism of an earlier generation, Japan for the second time chose to wage a war that most senior statesmen did not believe the empire would survive.

The Currents of War is an attempt to tell two stories at once. One is the interesting story of a critical chapter in the history of Japanese-American relations that ended at Pearl Harbor. The other story is the far more important examination of why American officials abandoned their successful containment policy in favor of a strategy that brought on the Pacific War, a conflict

that sowed the seeds of instability in Asia for a generation and led to American military involvement in both Korea and Vietnam.⁸

This study does not try to uncover a Roosevelt administration plot to deliberately bring the United States into World War II. Many postwar writers and historians have labored to construct a compelling narrative that connects the White House to the agonizing image of the Pacific Fleet, smashed and burning at anchor in Pearl Harbor. That the president sought to ensure England's survival and bring America into the war goes without saying. That Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany's prompt declaration of war on the United States served these ends is a given. But the argument that the president and his advisers deliberately brought about the Japanese attack remains spurious. While there is little to celebrate in the run-up to war with Japan, there is no need to twist a series of mistakes into a conspiracy.

Where possible, this study attempts to tell the Japanese side of the story, but those wishing a fuller account should examine any number of excellent works, including James William Morley's multivolume translation of *Tai-heiyo senso e no michi* (Japan's Road to the Pacific War) or Michael Barnhart's single-volume *Japan and the World since 1868*. Prewar Anglo-American diplomacy and the coming of the Pacific War, meanwhile, can best be understood by reading volume 1 of Warren F. Kimball's *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* or Anthony Best's *Britain, Japan, and Pearl Harbor: Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936–1941*.⁹

Race, religion, and economics also played a role in shaping American-Japanese relations, and the reader interested primarily in these issues should consult John Dower's *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, James Reed's *The Missionary Mind and American East Asian Policy, 1911–1915*, or William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.¹⁰

The story that follows is primarily an American one, based largely on American sources and records and the papers of the Americans who influenced, made, and carried out the policy that protected the Open Door and eventually led to Pearl Harbor. What follows, then, is in some respects an old-fashioned diplomatic history that focuses on the hopes and fears of elites, primarily Americans. A focus on policymakers and their policies long ago fell out of style among historians, but, especially when studying the history of American foreign relations, I have become convinced, we forget the old ways at our peril.

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Introduction

Commodore Matthew Perry was not a superstitious man. If he were, he would not have decided to follow the course to Edo Bay charted by earlier, failed US expeditions to Japan. Since 1790, some two dozen American vessels and countless others from Europe had visited the secluded islands. The Japanese, however, had turned away all expeditions because they threatened the shogun's self-imposed policy of isolation. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the islands' great feudal landed families, the daimyo, had waged a brutal and protracted civil war for control of the nation before Nobunaga Oda all but unified the country in 1580. Several factors contributed to Oda's success, foremost among them the skillful use of Western technology, which allowed him to impose his will on the other, less fortunate families. Oda was murdered, however, before he could cement his control over the country, so for another decade the great families vied to rule Japan. Finally, with its victory in the epoch-making battle of Sekigahara in October 1600, the Tokugawa clan began its 268-year reign. Determined to isolate Japan from the outside world and deny the other powerful feudal families access to the kind of Western technology that had proved so vital to men like Oda, the Tokugawa instituted a strict policy of isolation. Perry had come to Japan to tear down this wall of seclusion.¹

Perry's first glimpse of the shore revealed little owing to the typically dense July haze, but he believed that he knew what awaited him. The Japanese would resist him as they had the USS *Morrison* in 1837 when that vessel arrived in the islands carrying shipwrecked Japanese sailors. More recently, the Japanese had defied the US Asiatic Squadron, and a Japanese sailor knocked its commander, Commodore James Biddle, to the deck during an altercation. Despite this disheartening résumé of failure, President Millard Fillmore had decided to send Perry on yet another mission, this one to open Japan to American commerce and to arrange for a permanent diplomatic presence.²

Perry felt certain that he had devised a successful strategy for dealing with the sure-to-be-truculent Japanese. The key to success, he believed, lay in the story of an 1849 expedition sent to Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese main islands, which succeeded in securing the release of seventeen stranded seamen. Japanese authorities had attempted to drive the vessel, the USS *Preble*, from the harbor by marshaling nearby forces. However, when

the expedition's leader, Commodore James Glynn, explained "with the rough bluntness of a sailor . . . that they must immediately give up the men, or means would be found to compel them to do so," the sailors were quickly released. The Japanese apparently respected force. Perry thought that the 1849 incident provided a reliable blueprint, and he determined to build on Glynn's strategy and employ both the threat of force as well as "lavish pomp and ceremony."³

Soon after arriving in Edo Bay on July 8, 1853, Perry had occasion to test his strategy. As the fog lifted, Mount Fuji became visible, and Perry ordered his crew to make all the usual preparations for "meeting an enemy." He then summoned his captains to his flagship, the USS *Susquehanna*, for a last-minute briefing, after which his four vessels, half a world away from the nearest home port, dropped anchor. The small American flotilla received warning shots from shore and was virtually surrounded by Japanese ships but made no attempt to leave. When a Japanese boat drew alongside the *Susquehanna* in an effort to question the commodore, Perry refused and instead sent an ominous message to the nearby ships that surrounded his small fleet. "If all the boats were not away in fifteen minutes," he warned the Japanese, "he would not be responsible for the consequences." His stick worked, and the offending ships departed. While the commodore had managed to stare down the Japanese, he realized that neither the carrot nor the stick would force the Japanese government to abandon immediately the most effective policy yet devised for controlling its main rivals. Giving up sailors was one thing. Giving up a 250-year-old isolation policy was quite another, and, with supplies dwindling, Perry departed. He warned Japanese authorities, however, that, when he returned the following year, he expected to have his demands met.⁴

The following February, when he returned to Edo Bay, Perry got his answer from a somewhat more cooperative Japanese government. The shogun's senior advisers and the other great families had reached the consensus that resistance was futile and that playing for time—giving in to the Americans slowly and gradually while modernizing the nation—was the best option. Consequently, with the March 1854 Treaty of Kanagawa, the Japanese government agreed to open two ports and receive an American diplomat. Four years later, additional ports were opened, and, as feared, the Tokugawa shogun's days grew numbered.⁵

While it is impossible clearly to define an American view of Japan in the 1850s, it is apparent that in 1853 the US-Japanese relationship was adversarial. Perry sailed into Edo Bay with a specific goal, and the Tokugawa stood in his way. The Americans who came in 1853 also had a predominately negative view of the Japanese and expected to find a people who mistreated American sailors and abhorred Christianity. These were negative qualities indeed, especially

to Perry and his four boatloads of Christian sailors, yet the Japanese were also reputed to be “an exceedingly industrious and ingenious people.” After arriving in Japan, commander and crewmen alike remarked favorably on Japanese etiquette, the country’s natural beauty, and the people’s tidiness and sense of order. Not surprisingly, after the Kanagawa Treaty, the Japanese-American relationship lost its adversarial quality, and instead a dominant view emphasizing the friendliness and generosity of the Japanese people emerged.⁶

Of course, not all Japanese welcomed the Westerners who inundated the islands after Perry, but their actions did little to change the prevailing American mind-set. In particular, a group known as the *shishi*, or “men of high purpose,” tried to drive the foreigners from Japan and protect the emperor. These patriots assassinated Westerners and those government officials who had allowed the foreigners to enter the country, yet this violence did not alter how most Americans viewed Japan. When activists in the domain of Choshu fired on Western ships in 1864, for example, the *New York Times* informed its readers that the powerful “Prince of Choshu” (no such official existed) had connived to drive foreigners from Japan and that, while he deplored their actions, the “Taicoon” (the shogun) was powerless to stop him. Violence and anti-Americanism were neither inherent nor endemic, the newspaper assured its readers, and in time it predicted that with Western help the Japanese government would soon prove strong enough to keep the country open.⁷

The *Times*’s correspondent was right about a number of things and wrong about many more. Despite foreign aid, the Tokugawa government collapsed in 1868 after a brief rebellion led by the domains of Choshu and Satsuma. The new government, headed by young samurai primarily from these two provinces, proclaimed a restoration of imperial power, yet in reality the boy emperor Meiji remained subservient to the new samurai leadership. Driven by a genuine fear of Western domination, the new government sought to modernize rapidly in order to escape the fate that had befallen most other Asian nations. Modern Western states served as the model for Japanese reformers, and, once it became clear that the overthrow of the Tokugawa meant a further opening of Japan, Americans cheered.

The overthrow of the Tokugawa and the flowering of Japanese reform and modernization soon produced a unique bond between Japan and America. When an 1877 samurai rebellion threatened the new regime, for example, Americans sided with the government over the “quarrelsome, uneasy” samurai, who were “spoiling for a fight.” The effusive praise that former president Ulysses S. Grant received during his 1879 visit to Japan, meanwhile, was indicative of the unique and extraordinarily pro-American attitude among the Japanese.⁸

Japan's rapid modernization reminded Americans of their own recent history, and this contributed to a positive view of Japan and a generally friendly US foreign policy. Just as the Meiji Restoration destroyed Japan's hereditary class system, so too did the Civil War and Reconstruction destroy hereditary bound labor in America. Just as the events of 1868 tolled the death knell for Japan's centuries-old decentralized government, so too did Lee's surrender at Appomattox signal the end of extreme states' rights philosophy. With the shogun deposed, Japan's new leaders rushed westward to gain the secrets of modernization, and, with the end of the Civil War, Americans resumed their relentless march across the Pacific in search of markets. Americans appreciated and understood Japan's post-1868 experience because it was their experience as well. The yardsticks that tracked Japanese modernization—rising industrial output, railroad track mileage, literacy, and wealth—were the same measurements that marked America's phenomenal postwar progress.

Perhaps because of these shared experiences, Washington displayed a willingness to work with Japan that was more often than not absent in European capitals. The new Meiji government, for example, found itself bound by a series of unequal Tokugawa treaties that the United States, alone among the major powers, proved willing to revise. Washington even agreed to cooperate with Tokyo's campaign to control antigovernment, foreign-owned Japanese-language newspapers.⁹

In addition to the shared experience of rapid modernization, Americans and Japanese shared a Protestant Christian revival that also drew the two peoples closer together. The Protestant missionaries who arrived in Japan soon after Perry found that modernization and Westernization complemented their work so much so that by the mid-1880s Japan appeared "one of the most promising mission fields in the world." Their progress in converting the Japanese might appear glacial to the contemporary observer, but the *New York Times* declared: "The Japanese are rapidly turning to Christianity—not simply Christian civilization but organic Christianity." Linking Christianity and modernization, the *Times* noted how the traditional "religions of Japan" were "loosing their hold upon that remarkably progressive nation." During the late nineteenth century, Japan occupied the place in missionary hearts that China would assume early in the next century, and these pioneer missionaries propagated both the Protestant faith in Japan and a favorable image of that country in America. Missionaries repeatedly remarked on Japanese progress under the new government and were especially quick to defend Tokyo's treatment of its Christian converts.¹⁰

This favorable view of Japan as a modernizing and tolerant nation proved

fortuitous as it helped to both solidify the positive American mind-set and head off serious discord as both Japan and the United States sought to expand their influence in Asia. Modernization and Westernization, which were intended to preserve Japan's independence, transformed the once isolated and imperiled nation into an imperial power, and Korea, long a protectorate of China, quickly became the first nation to experience the less sanguine results of Japanese progress. Japan's penetration of Korea began in the 1870s and later accelerated as Tokyo attempted to push the enfeebled Chinese from the Hermit Kingdom and modernize the country along Japanese lines. Korean-American relations at this time were colored by the destruction of a US merchant ship and the slaughter of its primarily Chinese and Malayan crew as well as by a series of clashes that accompanied the 1871 American attempt to "open" the country in which three hundred or more Koreans died. Newspaper accounts that described Korean commerce as worthless, the people as "uncivilized," and the government as isolationist no doubt tempered America's commercial ardor as well as any jealousy resulting from Japan's more successful entrée. Normalized Korean-American relations, which came in 1882, did little to promote American trade, and, while Japan's growing position in Korea caused some friction within American business and religious circles, it did not fundamentally disturb Japanese-American relations.¹¹

That Americans stood aside quietly as Japan forced open Korea is not surprising. Social Darwinist thinking and America's own genocidal wars against the American Indians conditioned many to see Tokyo's actions as part of the natural order. Indeed, by the 1880s, Japan and the Japanese people had become the Asian embodiment of America and the American people, modern, bustling, dynamic, hardworking, organized, and patriotic. Koreans, on the other hand, represented an Asian version of the American Indian, disorganized, riven by factions, and unwilling to embrace modernity. The language that the leaders of the 1871 American expedition used to describe Koreans—"savages" and a "semi-barbarous and hostile race"—was almost verbatim that used to describe American Indians.¹²

Given this shared view of Korea, American authorities were hardly alarmed when, convinced that a hostile foreign power such as Russia would soon wrest control of the kingdom, Japan precipitated a showdown with China. Watching the long approach of war from the American legation in Seoul, John M. B. Sill, the American minister to Korea, informed Secretary of State Walter Gresham: "Japan seems to be very kindly disposed to Korea. She seems only to desire once [and] for all, to throw off the yoke of Chinese suzerainty, and then to assist her weak neighbor." On the eve of war, Sill

wired Gresham that the legation staff and resident Americans were in danger from both Chinese troops and Korean civilians but that the Japanese would protect them if need be. Far from an adversary, Japan was seen by officials as a protector of Americans and Koreans alike.¹³

In the ensuing 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War, American public opinion backed Japan, and the Cleveland administration offered behind-the-scenes advice to the Japanese on reasonable war aims. As the conflict neared its end, Gresham became an unofficial mediator, and in the resulting Treaty of Shimonoseki Japan gained the Chinese island of Formosa and a sizable war indemnity totaling some \$135 million. Faced with the so-called Triple Intervention, in which France, Germany, and Russia used the threat of military force to compel Tokyo to return the Liaotung Peninsula to China, Japan relinquished its most significant spoils. While the Triple Intervention robbed Japan of valuable wartime gains, America's esteem for its plucky protégé remained undiminished. In the midst of the fighting, the Cleveland administration rewarded Tokyo with a new commercial treaty that granted Japan considerable tariff autonomy and ended American extraterritoriality rights. In the intellectual climate of the *fin de siècle*, Japan represented the civilized West and “the Great Britain of Asia,” while China remained a stubborn and decadent example of the East. Dr. R. S. MacArthur, an American missionary with extensive experience in Asia, summed up the prevailing American view of the conflict. “The war between China and Japan,” he told an audience in New York City, “is really between barbarism and civilization, between hoary conservatism and modern progress, between heathenism and Christianity.”¹⁴

In the aftermath of Tokyo's victory, however, the first significant strains intruded on the heretofore tranquil Japanese-American relationship. While missionaries continued to present a positive image of Japan, many Japanese Christians began to chafe at the control imposed by their Western brethren and sought to manage their own religious affairs. If Japan controlled its own armed forces, they reasoned, why not their own Christian churches? If this was a logical question for a successful modernizer, it was also an unpopular one in Japan's American missionary community. A second source of Japanese-US friction grew out of Japan's economic modernization. By the mid-1890s, the Meiji economy produced consumer goods for Japan and much of the Asian mainland, much to the detriment of American exporters.¹⁵

The subtle change in the way that missionaries and businessmen viewed Japan, and the sudden recognition of Japanese military capabilities by civilian and military officials, did not destroy the Japanese-American friendship,

but it did point to future dangers. After 1895, for example, when Americans put a face to the “Yellow Peril,” that face increasingly was Japanese. Victories over China on land and sea shook even a reliably sympathetic *New York Times* to speculate that Tokyo “might yet overwhelm the East and even threaten Europe.” Just a little over a year after Shimonoseki, the US minister to Japan, Edwin Dun, publicly complained about the absurd number of letters that he received expressing fear over Japan’s postwar power and intentions. Ominously, many of those letters singled out what after Portsmouth would become the poison pills in the Japanese-American relationship: immigration and commerce.¹⁶

Despite these nagging issues, Washington and Tokyo retained their traditionally good relations and successfully navigated a host of potentially difficult situations, foremost among them the future of Hawaii. On the eve of the Spanish-American War, a crisis in Hawaii precipitated by the island kingdom’s decision to curtail Japanese immigration led senior officials, including Secretary of State John Sherman, to warn the American minister in Hawaii that Japan might use force against the islands. In the end, Washington and Tokyo resolved this crisis as they would many others in the decades that followed. In this instance, Washington dispatched naval forces to Hawaii in a show of deterrence while also assuring the Japanese government that after it annexed Hawaii the United States would pay any claims resulting from the ongoing immigration dispute.¹⁷

In the end, while the Hawaiian immigration controversy was of little historical importance, its politicization in both Japan and America was significant. The Meiji government had always, though often reluctantly, weighed the wishes of its citizens when shaping policy, and, with the inauguration of a constitutional system in 1890, the importance of public opinion grew. Opposition parties and the popular press began to scrutinize, object to, and even obstruct government programs, and in 1891, after just one year of constitutional rule, the government dissolved the Imperial Diet in an effort to push through various funding proposals. Increasingly, then, popular pressure began to shape government policy as never before, and during the 1890s public concern focused on the fate of Japanese communities overseas. The Japanese press in particular urged its government to take a strong stand, and, just days after a particularly lucid plea, Tokyo dispatched the cruiser *Naniwa* to Hawaii. While intended to mollify the public, the *Naniwa*’s sailing fueled increasingly virulent accounts of Japanese designs on Hawaii by proannexation groups within the United States that, thwarted on several previous occasions, used Japan as a cat’s paw to secure Washington’s takeover of the islands. Prior to the rise of Japanese military power, England served as the